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Impact Of Teacher Perceptions On Instructional Practices In Alternative Public High Schools

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IMPACT OF TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ON INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES IN ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Alternative schools are perceived by some as low performing schools with ineffective faculty and delinquent students. This perception affects the perceptions of some alternative school teachers about their students and influences the instructional practices they employ. By being aware of their perceptions and resulting practices, these educators can make a positive impact on the education of at-risk students in alternative settings. The purpose of this study was to understand how alternative school teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities influenced their instructional practices and how they perceived those practices support at-risk student academic success in public alternative high schools. To fulfill the purpose of this study, the following research questions were answered: (a) what are alternative school high school teachers' perceptions of alternative students' abilities and alternative education? (b) how do alternative high school teachers describe their experiences in promoting the academic success of their at-risk students? (c) how do alternative high school teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities influence their instructional choices? (d) how do alternative high school teachers perceive that their practices support at-risk student academic success? The research questions were answered through an exploratory case study using an open-ended, anonymous survey. The results indicated there are links between alternative teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities, their chosen instructional practices, and their perceptions of their instruction's

effectiveness. Further research is recommended to elaborate on some major findings of this study to increase its applicability and relevance to different alternative settings.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Alternative schools serve specific purposes: to serve at-risk students and provide an alternative approach to education to ensure student academic success and completion (Horsford & Powell, 2016; Jones, 2015). Alternative schools take many forms and can serve different at-risk student populations; they provide a second chance for students at-risk of failing or dropping out of school because of academic performance, family life, and/or socioeconomic status. Many alternative students find their alternative schools more supportive than the traditional schools they came from (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). Alternative school students who perceive that their faculty supports them are more likely to hold positive peer relationships and dedication to their education (Edgar-Smith, 2015). However, this is not the case with all alternative schools. Some alternative schools have shifted their purpose away from a positive choice toward a more negative option to detain students and keep them separate from mainstream classrooms.

Some alternative schools are schools of assignment instead of choice and are viewed by some as a place to detain at-risk students who are perceived as contaminants to their traditional school peers (Jones, 2015; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009) or as low-performing institutions populated with at-risk, disruptive students (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). This view of some alternative schools is reinforced by the increase in alternative school assignments as punishment or treatment for both major and minor academic and behavioral issues (Kennedy-Lewis, Whitaker, & Soutullo, 2016; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). To deal with the growing influx of seemingly disruptive at-risk students, alternative school staffs grouped these students together in restrictive educational settings which offered little to no instruction (Jovanovic, et al., 2014; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). Such choices, made by traditional and alternative school faculty, to

offer limited types of educational opportunities communicate their perceptions that these at-risk youths' abilities are inferior (Peltenburg & van den Heuvel-Panhuizen, 2012). It may then follow that such students do not deserve standard educational opportunities (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). Researchers found that negative faculty perceptions perpetuated the students' poor academic outcomes and behaviors (Dandy, Durkin, Barber, & Houghton, 2015; Garza, 2012; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). The resulting negative feedback loop reinforces the perception that some alternative schools are institutions with low-performing and poorly-behaved students and second-rate faculty (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016) where students are isolated from adequate educational opportunities. They create an environment in which student academic and behavioral problems continue, further perpetuating the negative perceptions of these alternative schools (Dandy et al., 2015; Garza, 2012; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009).

These alternative school staffs and their communities continue to maintain a negative perception of their own schools. Their reputations may contribute to poor academic performance and limit the future of their students (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). By pinpointing teachers' methods that teachers believe to be effective, this study addressed the following problem of practice: how alternative school teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities impact their students' academic performance. The results of this study may inform school and classroom practices that may increase at-risk student academic performance, which in turn, may increase at-risk students' future socioeconomic mobility (Drotos & Cilesiz, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

As an alternative to traditional schools, the purpose of some alternative schools is to serve students who are at-risk of failing or dropping out of school because of their academic performance, behavior problems, or chronic absenteeism (Jones, 2015). Alternative schools aim

to provide at-risk students with a different approach to education to ensure their academic success and completion (Horsford & Powell, 2016; Jones, 2015). However, with the increased use of alternative school assignments as punishment for low academic performance and poor behaviors, some alternative schools are often associated with bad students and a sub-par education (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). Some teachers believe students are placed in educational settings appropriately (Yanisko, 2016), so these negative associations may cause those teachers to form assumptions which then influence their practices, sometimes in negative ways (Glock, 2016; Jovanovic, Simic, & Rajovic, 2014). There are alternative schools and programs that employ well-trained faculty with expertise in the instruction and behavior management of at-risk students (Edgar-Smith, 2015). However, there are instances where alternative settings employ faculty who provide less instruction in an attempt to placate students who are perceived as difficult (Jovanovic, et al., 2014; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). Since the purpose of alternative schools is to provide at-risk students with an alternative approach to learning to ensure their academic success, the negative impact of negative perceptions on instruction is a concern (Horsford & Powell, 2016; Jones, 2015; Kumasi, 2012). When alternative school faculty mis-educate their students by providing fewer opportunities, they threaten at-risk student academic success and may limit upward mobility (Drotos & Cilesiz, 2014; Horsford & Powell, 2016). At-risk students who encounter repeated academic challenges and failures develop negative perceptions about school that increase their chances of dropping out of school (Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017). Encouraging faculty to communicate positive perceptions of their at-risk students increases the likelihood that the at-risk students will make academic choices that respond to those positive perceptions (Stein & Hussong, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how alternative school teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities influenced their instructional practices and how they perceived those practices support at-risk student academic success in public alternative high schools. Teachers' responses about their experiences in promoting academic success for their at-risk students were examined. Teachers' responses regarding their perceptions of their at-risk students' abilities were compared to their shared instructional practices. These teacher responses were then compared to their perceptions of how their instructional practices supported their students' academic success. These comparisons determined which teacher practices stemmed from positive and negative teacher perceptions of student abilities.

Informing and changing teacher perceptions of student abilities and their practices to increase at-risk student performance, especially for those in alternative settings, is essential to increasing students' chances at graduation, post-secondary success, and socioeconomic mobility (Horsford & Powell, 2016). At-risk students who encounter negative perceptions and encounter negative educational experiences are less likely to attend the schools of their choice and pursue the majors of their choice (Gillian-Daniel & Kraemer, 2015). This outcome directly affects at-risk student motivation, performance, and retention (Gillian-Daniel & Kraemer, 2015). Highlighting the best practices revealed in the comparison of anonymous teacher survey responses may affirm or inform teachers' practices as they work to effectively engage and reach their at-risk students and attempt to close achievement gaps (Gillian-Daniel & Kraemer, 2015). Closing achievement gaps, increasing at-risk student graduation rates, and socioeconomic mobility begins with promoting at-risk student success (Gillian-Daniel & Kraemer, 2015; Horsford & Powell, 2016).

Research Questions

This qualitative, exploratory case study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are alternative school high school teachers' perceptions of alternative students' abilities and alternative education?
2. How do alternative high school teachers describe their experiences in promoting the academic success of their at-risk students?
3. How do alternative high school teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities influence their instructional choices?
4. How do alternative high school teachers perceive that their practices support at-risk student academic success?

Anonymous teacher surveys were used to determine how faculty's perceptions of their students dictated the practices they employed. Teachers' responses regarding their perceptions of their at-risk students' abilities were analyzed to determine if they held positive or negative perceptions of their students' abilities. Teachers' responses regarding their instructional practices were used to compare their perceptions to their chosen instructional practices. The relationship between teacher perceptions of student abilities and teacher practices were compared to their perceptions of how their instructional practices supported their students' academic success. This study documented the influence of alternative teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities on the instructional practices they used to provide instruction for their students. This study also documented how effective teachers perceived that their practices promoted student academic success. Additionally, this study determined which teacher practices stemmed from positive and negative teacher perceptions of student abilities.

Significance

The data from this study especially benefits alternative schools since the student performance outcomes of alternative schools are stagnant or declining (Horsford & Powell, 2016; Wilkerson, Afacan, Perzigian, Justin, & Lequia, 2016). The importance of at-risk student academic success to their future socioeconomic mobility justifies the need for using more effective practices and supports inside the alternative classroom (Drotos & Cilesiz, 2014). The best practices revealed in the data may help schools better meet the needs of their students. Faculty may be more aware of how their perceptions direct the practices and supports they provide to their at-risk students. Leaders at other schools and programs may use the findings to determine applicable practices to implement in their education of the at-risk students at their sites. The focus of this study was to uncover the perceptions of teachers and their practices that prove to be supportive and effective in alternative schools. The responses from teachers may inform practices of leaders within alternative schools and programs.

Definition of Terms

Alternative school. An alternative school is an educational option for at-risk students designed to meet their unique needs in order to increase their chances of grade promotion and graduation (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2014).

At-risk student. An at-risk student is a student in danger of failing or dropping out of school due to lack of attendance, disruptive behavior, unsuccessful completion of coursework, and/or socioeconomic factors (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2014).

Critical thinking. Critical thinking is thought that requires individuals to move past memorization and recall of information to analysis, evaluation, interpretation, and synthesis (Critical Thinking, 2013).

Integrated curriculum. Integrated curriculum is a course of study that requires students to make connections between skills, subject areas, themselves, and/or the world (Drake & Burns, 2004).

Project-Based Learning. Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an instructional method that requires students to engage in a sustained research project where they acquire knowledge and skills as they provide solutions to real-world problems or answers to complex questions (Buck Institute for Education, 2017).

Conceptual Framework

The literature revealed there is a relationship between teacher perceptions of students' abilities and their instructional practices (Garza, 2012) and that the choice of instructional design has an impact on student achievement (Dandy et al., 2015). This study explored this relationship to determine the nature of teacher perceptions of at-risk students and the resulting choices for instruction. Furthermore, the study examined teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their instructional choices that resulted from their perceptions of their students. The anonymous teacher survey responses presented opportunities for the researcher to identify the practices teachers perceived to positively impact at-risk student success.

Assumptions and Limitations

Limitations include the dissemination of the survey. By using a survey, finding participants that fit the targeted population presented a challenge. Additionally, using an online survey may have deterred potential participants if they were not comfortable using technology or sharing information over the internet. Though the study is limited in this way, disseminating the survey online was far-reaching and may have increased the number of responses and variety in the participants' teaching settings (rural, urban, and suburban) which increased this study's

applicability. While the anonymous survey noted specific selection criteria, this study also assumed that all participants who completed the survey fit the targeted population. The research design of this study supported the purpose of the study as survey responses regarding perceptions and instructional practices from multiple participants were compared. While one could argue that at-risk students' academic success increases in classes where teachers hold positive perceptions of their students, others could argue that academic success is attributed to students' intelligences (Levpuscek, 2013). The above elements may make it difficult for other alternative schools and programs of larger sizes and demographics to use the findings of this study to inform their practices. Also, as a former instructional coach and educator at an alternative high school, the researcher's objectivity was essential in accurately representing the participants in this study. To mitigate bias, the researcher used reflexive journaling throughout the collection and analysis processes to self-monitor and self-evaluate practices to maintain objectivity and consider alternate approaches, as needed (Barry & O'Callaghan, 2008).

Conclusion

Some alternative schools are perceived as low performing schools with low performing faculty and delinquent students (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). This perception of some alternative schools may influence teachers' perceptions of their students and choices of instruction they provide their students (Kumasi, 2012; Yanisko, 2016). Faculty perceptions play a large role in the academic performance of at-risk students (Dandy et al., 2015). By studying educators that employed practices they saw as effective, there was an opportunity to uncover effective approaches to the education of at-risk alternative students. If other alternative schools and programs that are negatively perceived adopt these approaches and implement them, not only may their teaching and learning change, but the outside perceptions of

these alternative schools may begin to change too. Instead of being perceived as holding cells for problem students, these alternative schools may be perceived by their original purpose: promoting the success of at-risk youth (Jones, 2015). Chapter Two reviews the existing literature related to this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to understand how alternative school teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities influenced their instructional practices and how they perceived those practices to support at-risk student academic success in public alternative high schools. To understand how teachers' perceptions of their at-risk students may have influenced their instructional choices and to recognize the specific instructional practices that may have contributed to the academic success of at-risk students, the researcher conducted an analytical review of the existing literature surrounding these concepts. This literature review delves into alternative schools, at-risk students, teachers' perceptions, and effective instructional practices for engaging and promoting the academic success of at-risk students. The literature reviewed on alternative schools provides the context for the teachers' sites investigated in this study. Literature on at-risk students provides background on the student demographic typically served by the teachers and schools in this study. The texts on teacher perceptions of student abilities presents the possible influences these perceptions may have on their instructional choices. The writing on effective instructional practices for reaching at-risk youth was reviewed to convey recommended pedagogy of teachers who educate at-risk students.

This literature review utilized several informational sources, including books, dissertations, internet sources, and professional journals. The majority of these sources were retrieved from ERIC-EBSCO. Literature surrounding the purpose and development of alternative schools was selected from an undefined timeframe to allow access to significant literature on the history of alternative schools. Most of the literature on at-risk students and teacher perceptions was selected from a limited time frame of 2011-2017 to provide current

information that may be more applicable to the conceptual framework of this study. Some literature outside of this range was included as they were significant to the topic. For example, the first national study on alternative schools by Arnove and Strought (1978) included in Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016) study, "Maybe that helps folks feel better about what they're doing": Examining contradictions between educator presumptions, student experiences, and outcomes at an alternative school"; and Ladson-Billings' critically acclaimed book, *The Dreamkeepers* (2009), that examines the practices of teachers who are able to reach their at-risk students; these were intentionally included in this review because of the significance of the works.

In each major section of the literature (alternative schools, at-risk students, teacher perceptions, and effective practices for engaging at-risk students), pertinent information is presented and discussed. Each major body of literature is then followed by a summary that reviewed the significant points presented in the section. At the end of the review, the gaps in literature are discussed.

Review of Relevant Research

Once another opportunity at success, some alternative schools are now negatively perceived (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). This perception of these schools stems from the increased use of the alternative school assignment as a punishment for students with either major or minor academic and behavioral concerns (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). This tactic contributes to the negative perceptions of some alternative schools (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). Also contributing to the perception of some alternative schools is the creation of alternative schools for the sole purpose of "maintain[ing] school safety and preserv[ing] a least disruptive learning environment" (Jones, 2015, p. 2) for traditional schools.

In fact, one study found teachers at traditional schools used alternative school assignments as threats to students in an effort to change behavior (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016).

While the perception of the quality and purposes of some alternative schools stems from its student demographic, perceptions also stem from some of their faculty (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). Schools with high numbers of at-risk students are hard-to-staff (Yanisko, 2016) and are more likely to employ teachers with less experience, fewer certifications, and less education (Mason-Williams & Gagnon, 2017). In a national study, Arnove and Strought (1978) found the perception of alternative schools was that they lacked the capable educators and sufficient resources to serve their students (as cited in Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). As a result of the perceived student and teacher demographics, some alternative schools are seen as institutions for housing undisciplined students and ineffectual teachers (Bascia & Maton, 2016). These two perspectives contribute to the negative perceptions of alternative schools and their academic performances as a whole (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016).

At-Risk Students

Students are identified as at-risk because they are at a higher risk of academic failure or dropping out of school than their contemporaries ("At-Risk," 2013). At-risk students typically lack support from their communities, families, and schools (Popp et al., 2011). Due to the lack of support, many at-risk students experience "…homelessness, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, serious health issues, domestic violence, transiency…learning disabilities, disciplinary problems, grade retentions, or other learning-related factors" ("At-Risk," 2013, para. 1). All of these factors negatively impact an at-risk student's academic performance, behavior, and ability to stay in school ("At-Risk," 2013; McGee & Lin, 2017). More often than not, at-risk students academically achieve at lower levels due to their difficulty in mastering rudimentary material

and due to their repeated academic failures (Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017). In terms of behavior, at-risk students usually become disruptive because they feel unable to meet academic expectations (Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017). Considering their challenges with academic performance and behavior, at-risk students tend to develop negative feelings about school and disengage from it, regarding school as boring and becoming more likely to dropout (Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017). Consequently, at-risk students have additional academic needs than traditional students such as frequent monitoring of academic performance (Morrow & Torrez, 2012; Popp et al., 2011) and increased academic support (Engelen-Eigles & Milner, 2014). In order to ensure the success of at-risk students, there is an increasing need for educators and schools to transition from focusing on outside factors that negatively impact at-risk student performance to focusing on effective teaching and learning practices that increase at-risk student performance (Popp et al., 2011). Since schools cannot completely control the outside factors that affect students, researchers encourage teachers to use their knowledge of these outside factors to inform their classroom practices (Milner, Murray, & Farinde, 2015). For example, providing tutoring to at-risk students who are chronically absent or struggling academically or providing mentoring to at-risk students who lack parental support (Milner, Murray, & Farinde, 2015).

Teacher perceptions and at-risk students. Assumptions about an at-risk student's status, experiences, and/or needs influence the way teachers perceive the at-risk student overall, positively or negatively (Garza, 2012; Jovanovic et al., 2014). Researchers found teachers who held positive assumptions perceived their disabled, at-risk students as diligent and motivated and were more likely to work with their parents and colleagues to support their students (Jovanovic et al., 2014, p. 230). In contrast, teachers who held negative assumptions perceived their disabled, at-risk students as disruptive and low-achieving and were more likely to disregard the

students' social and emotional needs (Jovanovic et al., 2014). Another study, focused on at-risk minority students, found some teachers formed perceptions about at-risk students based on assumptions of their academic performance (Glock, 2016). Teachers who read about a seemingly high-performing student described feelings of enthusiasm and self-confidence in reaching the student as the student was believed to be easy-to-teach (Glock, 2016, p. 502). The researcher suggested that the opposite was also true: teachers who read about a seemingly low-performing student may express less enthusiasm as they may have to work harder to reach the student (Glock, 2016, p. 502). According to Yanisko (2016), teachers in hard-to-staff schools, like alternative schools, hold negative perceptions of their students' academic abilities and may employ inferior instructional practices and curriculum (p. 155). Yanisko (2016) stated that teachers who hold negative perceptions of their at-risk students' abilities tend to provide instruction that requires less critical thinking, collaboration, or problem solving (p. 156). Offering poor quality educational opportunities is in opposition to the research surrounding effective instructional practices for engaging and reaching at-risk students.

Teacher Perceptions and Instructional Practices

Teachers' perceptions of their students' influence the learning opportunities they provide them (Dandy et al., 2015). Teachers with high expectations for their students create a classroom environment that supports their students' academic needs and success (Peltenburg & van den Heuvel-Panhuizen, 2012). Sometimes, however, teachers' expectations are based on their assumptions of their students' abilities (Peltenburg & van den Heuvel-Panhuizen, 2012; Timmermans, de Boer, & van der Werf, 2016). When teachers believe students are correctly placed in educational settings, they form assumptions of their students and their abilities based on the setting in which they are placed (Yanisko, 2016). For example, a teacher may hold the

assumption that a student in an Honors course is gifted and that a student in a remedial course is low-performing. These assumptions are inaccurate since students may be sorted into courses and programs for reasons that have little to no relation to students' actual abilities (Yanisko, 2016). Often teachers form assumptions or perceptions of students' abilities based on characteristics that are separate from students' true abilities (Hansen, 2016). Timmermans et al. (2016) study pointed out that teachers' perceptions of students' abilities were higher when teachers perceived students' engagement as higher. Their study concluded that teachers held positive perceptions of their students' abilities when they exhibited more effort, completed assignments regularly, paid more attention, and behaved well (Timmermans et al., 2016, p. 221). These perceptions influenced teachers' approaches to instruction (Yanisko, 2016). When teachers hold positive perceptions of their students, they tend to provide higher quality instruction (Yanisko, 2016). When teachers hold negative perceptions of their students, they tend to provide lower quality instruction (Yanisko, 2016). For example, teachers communicate their perceptions to their students through feedback and the choice of learning materials, giving more positive feedback and more challenging work to students they perceive positively (Upadyaya & Eccles, 2015, p. 112). Teachers' perceptions foster inequality in learning opportunities, which impacts students' academic progress (Peltenburg & van den Heuvel-Panhuizen, 2012).

Teacher Perceptions, Student Intelligence, and Academic Performance

While it is certain students' intelligences play a role in their academic performance, it is not the sole reason for academic success (Levpuscek, Zupancic, & Socan, 2013, p. 525). One study found teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities still influenced their students' academic performance even when their "intelligence was controlled for" (Upadyaya & Eccles, 2015, p. 124). Levpuscek et al. (2013) found the academic supports teachers provide their

students communicate caring about student progress and reflect positive perceptions about academic potential (Levpuscek et al., 2013). VanDeWeghe found that the way a teacher communicates about academic potential can impact students' perception of their own intelligence and, thus, impact their academic achievement (2003). Praise, feedback, and modeling are all practices that influence students' views of their abilities (VanDeWeghe, 2003, p. 72). These views influence student motivation and can affect their academic achievement (VanDeWeghe, 2003). More than their intelligence, the way a student approaches learning impacts his/her academic achievement (Cano, 2007, p. 145)

Teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities are formed by factors other than their students' actual abilities (Hansen, 2016). Teachers' perceptions are influenced by their assumptions of accurate course placement, student engagement, effort, assignment completion, attentiveness, and behavior (Timmermans et al., 2016, p. 221; Yanisko, 2016). Teachers convey their perceptions of their students' abilities through the learning opportunities they grant their students (Peltenburg & van den Heuvel-Panhuizen, 2012). Researchers found teachers who held positive perceptions of their students provided higher quality instruction than those who held negative perceptions of their students (Yanisko, 2016). In the case of teachers of at-risk students, like those in alternative schools, most hold negative perceptions of their students' academic abilities and employ lesser-quality instructional practices (Yanisko, 2016). Though one could argue student intelligence considerably influences academic performance (Levpuscek, 2013), it is the manner in which the student seeks learning opportunities that has a greater influence on his/her academic achievement (Cano, 2007).

Effective Instructional Practices for Engaging At-Risk Students

Since a teacher's instructional practices stem from his/her perception of his/her students' abilities (Yanisko, 2016), inaccurate perceptions can impact students' academic achievement even 10 years later (Sorhagen, 2013). To impact the academic achievement of at-risk students, alternative school faculty must provide rigorous instruction that engages students in critical thinking, integrated curriculum, and project-based learning (Maillet, 2017; Popp et al., 2011; Rozansky & Aagesen, 2010). At-risk students are more engaged in classes where they identify higher-quality instruction being used and are less likely to drop out (Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017).

Critical Thinking

One characteristic of higher-quality instruction is the use of critical thinking pedagogy. Popp et al. (2011) examined award-winning teachers of at-risk students and discovered their classroom instruction stressed higher level thinking skills, which forced students to make connections between concepts. This type of instruction "…focus[ed] on making meaning rather than memorizing facts" (p. 288). At-risk students engaged in critical thinking through applying and analyzing concepts rather than simply recalling information (Popp et al., 2011). In an 8th grade social studies classroom, a teacher significantly increased at-risk student academic achievement by incorporating critical thinking through literacy strategies that required students to connect concepts to current events and their lives (Gaston, Martinez, & Martin, 2016). Gaston et al. (2016) found that this particular teacher's at-risk students outperformed another class of at-risk students who only received direct teacher instruction. Leonardos (1992) found that at-risk students outperformed their non-at-risk peers in an oral interview after their teachers implemented critical thinking literacy practices. The teachers of these at-risk students fostered

critical thinking through integrated curriculum and thematic discussions focused on texts (Leonardos, 1992). Other researchers discovered that emphasis on critical thinking in an 8th grade reading class for low achieving readers increased the students' literacy skills (Rozansky & Aagesen, 2010). This 8th grade reading class engaged in readers' theater and connected texts to current events and real-world scenarios (Rozansky & Aagesen, 2010). In another middle school, teachers used higher level thinking questions to encourage inquiry and increased their at-risk students' performance on a final assessment by 6% (Daniels, Hamby, & Chen, 2015, p. 14).

Integrated Curriculum and Project-Based Learning

Another powerful practice in high-quality instruction, specifically for alternative programs, utilizes critical thinking by integrating subjects through learning projects (Maillet, 2016). In fact, integrated instruction plays a large role in the academic achievement of at-risk students (Izumi, Shen, & Xia, 2013). Researchers found the at-risk students at an alternative school increased their academic achievement when teachers used thematic teaching to integrate curriculum (Bascia & Maton, 2016). Using these themes, teachers presented students with higher-level thinking questions that required students to make connections between subject areas and other fields of study (Bascia & Maton, 2016). To integrate instruction, many teachers of at-risk students used project-based learning and found it to be helpful in engaging their students and increasing their performance (Bargerhuff, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Maillet, 2016). Ladson-Billings (2009) studied teachers who used interdisciplinary project-based learning to encourage their at-risk students to make connections between subjects, their culture, and their communities. In classroom observations, Ladson-Billings noticed the students in these classrooms increased their engagement and higher-level thinking. In a STEM school focused on meeting the needs of at-risk students with disabilities, teachers discussed successes with student academic growth

using project-based learning and integrating subject areas (Bargerhuff, 2013). These projects used real-world application and required students to make connections between subjects, like science and engineering, and global issues through community service projects (Bargerhuff, 2013). In another study, Holms & Hwang (2014) uncovered project-based learning in mathematics increased the academic performance of at-risk students. These researchers found the project-based learning elements of integrated curriculum and real-world application increased at-risk students' knowledge retention (Holms & Hwang, 2014). Instead of seeing subject areas in isolation, integrated curriculum and project-based learning allowed students to see the interconnectedness of them.

Collaboration. Collaboration is an element of project-based learning (Buck Institute for Education, 2017). Holmes (2016) stated one of the reasons why project-based learning is beneficial for at-risk students is because, unlike traditional teacher-centered instruction, collaboration does not isolate students and encourages students to interact with others; it is a critical element that increases students' critical thinking, motivation, and engagement (Holmes, 2016). This interaction provides students with another form of scaffolding, which is another effective practice for at-risk students outlined in this literature review (Holmes, 2016). In observations of fourth grade students in a public school serving a high number of at-risk students, La Porte (2016) found student collaboration led to increased student self-confidence, academic motivation, and achievement. McGee and Fan-Yu (2017) stated collaboration is an effective practice in alternative education as it requires the use of life skills like public speaking, problem-solving, teamwork, and time management—essential skills needed for students' post-secondary endeavors. McGee and Fan-Yu (2017) also discovered that collaboration, in the form of mentoring, was another effective practice in alternative education because it monitored

student performance and helped students mitigate through challenging situations. Mentoring and monitoring of student performance are both academic supports supported by the literature in this study.

Academic Supports

Providing at-risk students with a considerable amount of support stems from the idea of leveling the academic playing field (Engelen-Eigles & Milner, 2014). By providing at-risk students with supports, teachers and administration alike are able to close learning and achievement gaps between at-risk students and their non-at-risk peers (Darling-Hammond, 2015). To engage at-risk students and support their academic achievement, alternative school faculty can provide academic supports via classroom practices, frequent monitoring of academic performance, and mentoring (Putwain, Nicholson, & Edwards, 2016).

Classroom practices. Teachers of at-risk students often use a strategy called scaffolding to model and breakdown learning material into manageable chunks and to provide students with guided and individual practice (Swanson & Nagy, 2014). Successful teachers of at-risk students use the following scaffolds: (a) activating prior knowledge, (b) using graphic organizers to link ideas and texts, (c) providing individual remediation and utilizing pacing, (d) offering several chances for peer interaction, (e) modeling activities before deployment, and (f) frequently using formative assessment (Swanson & Nagy, 2014, pp. 246-248). By incorporating numerous opportunities for students to connect, examine, and understand learning material, teachers take a more proactive approach to teaching. In taking a proactive approach rather than a reactive one, teachers of at-risk students can predict where their students will struggle and plan interventions accordingly rather than wait for their students to fail and then provide support. Pro-active

classroom approaches and interventions like the ones used in scaffolding increase the likelihood of academic success for at-risk students (Zhang, Fei, Quddus, & Davis, 2014).

Frequent monitoring of academic performance. Creating an avenue for at-risk students to set academic goals and monitor them regularly increases their chances of academic success and advancement (Morrow & Torrez, 2012; Swanson & Nagy, 2014). Zhang et al. (2014) found at-risk students who sought academic advising earned a higher GPA, had a higher passing rate, and had a lower chance of withdrawal from classes than those who opted out of academic advising. In addition to increased academic performance, at-risk students who received academic advising or monitoring on a regular basis increased their chances of not only applying for college, but also increased their chances of being accepted to institutions of higher learning (Zhang et al., 2014). By receiving feedback and questions regarding their academic performance, these at-risk students were constantly aware of their progress towards their goals and were held accountable for them.

Mentoring. Another effective support for at-risk students is mentoring. Providing mentors—like teachers, administrators, or community members—opens channels of communication about college and career paths (Morrow & Torrez, 2012). One school found their students were more apt to discuss post-high school opportunities because mentors prioritized such discussions (Morrow & Torrez, 2012). Another study, focused on at-risk students and STEM, revealed students not only expanded their vocabulary and knowledge of STEM subjects through mentoring, but they took ownership of their learning and built workplace skills. Furthermore, mentoring encouraged at-risk students to become more aware of college opportunities (Monk et al., 2014). In order to cultivate motivation to meet high expectations,

students need to be exposed to opportunities which show them the relevance behind the rigor in thinking critically (Swanson & Nagy, 2014).

At-risk students are less likely to drop out if they are enrolled in classes where they recognize the teacher is using higher-quality instruction (Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017). Higher-quality instruction utilizes critical thinking, integrated curriculum, and project-based learning to increase at-risk students' academic growth (Maillet, 2017; Popp et al., 2011; Rozansky & Aagesen, 2010). In addition to providing high-quality instruction, providing students with support within the classroom through scaffolding (Zhang et al., 2014), frequent monitoring of their academic performance (Morrow & Torrez, 2012), and providing students with mentors (Morrow & Torrez, 2012) increases at-risk students' chances at academic success.

Gaps in Literature

Arnove and Strought (1978) found the overall perception of alternative schools as a negative one that assumes the students are disruptive, that the teachers are poorly qualified and ineffective, and that the academic achievement is low (as cited in Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). The literature clearly supported the impact of teacher perceptions of student abilities on at-risk student academic success (Dandy et al., 2015). Throughout recent studies on alternative schools and at-risk students, teacher perceptions of student ability was prevalent (Gillian-Daniel, 2015; Johnson, 2017; Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017; Maillet, 2017; Montas-Hunter, 2012; Popp, et al., 2011; Riconscente, 2014; Rozansky & Aagesen, 2010; Sorhagen, 2013; Stein & Hussong, 2007).

Another common theme found in the literature surrounding alternative schools and at-risk students was the use of critical thinking, integrated curriculum, and project-based learning to engage and reach at-risk students. In the existing literature focused on supporting at-risk students

(Engelen-Eigles & Milner, 2014; Jovanovic et al., 2014; van Dintheret al., 2014; Yetkin & Pape, 2013) frequent monitoring of academic performance (Morrow & Torrez, 2012; Swanson & Nagy, 2014; Zhang et al., 2014) and mentoring (Monk et al., 2014; Morrow & Torrez, 2012) proved most effective. Several studies addressed one or a combination of the following concepts:

1. Faculty's perceptions and the impact of these perceptions on their practices (Glock, 2016; Jovanovic, et al., 2014; Kumasi, 2012; Peltenburg & van den Heuvel-Panhuizen, 2012; Yanisko, 2016);
2. Engaging at-risk students (Maillet, 2017; Popp et al., 2011; Rozansky & Aagesen, 2010); and
3. Contributors to at-risk student success (Bargerhuff, 2013; Daniels et al., 2015; Gaston et al., 2016; Holmes, 2016; Holms & Hwang, 2014; Izumi et al., 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Leonardos, 1992; McGee and Fan-Yu, 2017; Morrow & Torrez, 2012; Rozansky & Aagesen, 2010; Zhang, et al., 2014).

One of the most significant gaps in the literature reviewed in this study was the small number of studies that researched how teacher's perceptions of their at-risk students' abilities influence their instructional practices and how they perceive those practices to support at-risk student academic success in public alternative high school settings. Only three studies out of those reviewed emphasized at-risk students in an alternative high school (Horsford & Powell, 2016; Izumi et al., 2015; Wilkerson et al., 2016). The conceptual framework and methodology of this study sought to address this gap.

Conceptual Framework

An analysis of the existing literature, in addition to the researcher's experiences in an alternative high school, helped to form the conceptual framework for this study. The conceptual

framework is the backbone or organization of this study and informed the research process, methodology, and data analysis. Each variable of this study—alternative teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities, teachers' chosen practices, and teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their practices in supporting at-risk student academic success —stemmed from the study's research questions:

1. What are alternative school high school teachers' perceptions of alternative students' abilities and alternative education?
2. How do alternative high school teachers describe their experiences in promoting the academic success of their at-risk students?
3. How do alternative high school teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities influence their instructional choices?
4. How do alternative high school teachers perceive that their practices support at-risk student academic success?

The first research question aimed to determine whether teachers held negative or positive perceptions of alternative students and alternative education as a whole. The second research question intended to determine what negative or positive perceptions teachers held for their own alternative, at-risk students. As such, *teacher perceptions* was a valid category for coding responses related to these questions. The third question sought to find how these teachers' negative or positive perceptions influenced the type of learning opportunities they provided their students. Therefore, *teacher instructional choices* was a cogent category for coding responses related to this question. The last question sought to reveal the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their instructional practices in supporting at-risk student academic success. For this reason, *effective instructional practices for engaging at-risk youth* was another category for

coding responses related to this question. To outline and explain each category, subcategories were created for each category based on the literature reviewed and the survey data. Depending on the data that was collected, some subcategories changed.

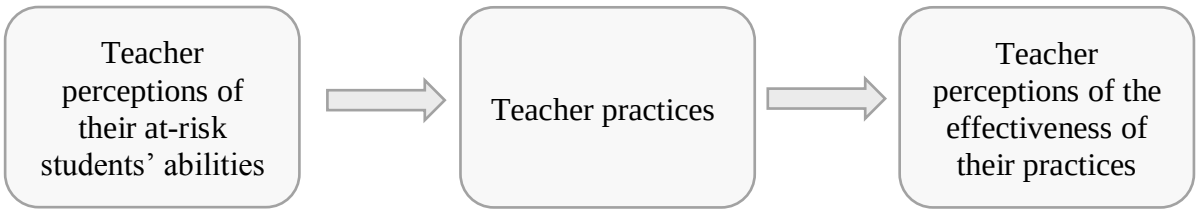

Figure 1. Conceptual framework. This figure illustrates the conceptual framework of this study. The figure demonstrates the progression from faculty perceptions of students to teachers' chosen practices to perceptions of instructional practice effectiveness.

Conclusion

Though some alternative schools' reputations for poorly behaved students, poor instruction, and poor academic achievement may not be accurate, this perception can impact some alternative school teachers' perceptions of their at-risk students' abilities. When teachers assume students have been placed in the educational settings appropriately, they form assumptions of their students and their abilities (Yanisko, 2016). If this is true for traditional educational settings, this may also be true for alternative school assignments. Teachers may assume students are placed in alternative schools appropriately and then form assumptions of their students and their abilities based on their perceptions of alternative schools and at-risk students as a whole. These assumptions influence teachers' instructional choices (Kumasi, 2012) and impact student academic progress (Peltenburg & van den Heuvel-Panhuizen, 2012). Sorhagen (2013) indicated that teachers' positive or negative perceptions of students' abilities have a larger impact on at-risk students' academic progress than non-at-risk students.

This exploratory case study attempted to find the connection between alternative teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities, teachers' chosen instructional practices, teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their instructional practices in alternative high schools through examining anonymous teacher survey responses. This study also attempted to reveal the instructional practices of teachers who promote at-risk student academic success: critical thinking, integrated curricula, Project-Based Learning, collaboration, scaffolding, frequent monitoring of academic performance, and mentoring. Based on the existing research of teacher perceptions of student abilities and student achievement, the rationale of this exploratory case study was the need for research at the high school level as well as the need for research on at-risk students and alternative education. This study may provide relevant information to those in alternative education and those who serve at-risk students, so they may inform and/or change their practices. By educators informing their practices according to the findings of this study, at-risk students can be provided with the tools to climb out of low socioeconomic backgrounds, defy social perceptions, and create more opportunities for their futures (Drotos & Cilesiz, 2014; Engelen-Eigles & Milner, 2014; Horsford & Powell, 2016).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how alternative school teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities influenced their instructional practices and how they perceived those practices to support at-risk student academic success in public alternative high schools. The following research questions were used to guide this exploratory case study:

1. What are alternative school high school teachers' perceptions of alternative students' abilities and alternative education?
2. How do alternative high school teachers describe their experiences in promoting the academic success of their at-risk students?
3. How do alternative high school teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities influence their instructional choices?
4. How do alternative high school teachers perceive that their practices support at-risk student academic success?

This chapter provides a description of the chosen study participants (alternative high school teachers) and qualitative data (survey responses) used for this study. Following this description is an explanation of the study's qualitative approach: an exploratory case study with an open-ended survey. This chapter also outlines the study's data collection methods and data analysis process as well as its limitations and assumptions.

The nature of this study lent itself to a qualitative research approach. Perceptions, experiences, and instructional practices cannot easily be captured by quantitative data; therefore, a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to uncover these elements without "destroying [their] complexity and context" (Atieno, 2009, p. 16). To explore this study's conceptual

framework, the researcher needed to utilize an approach that allowed for the finding of reoccurring themes (Atieno, 2009). For this reason, a qualitative approach fit the purpose of this study.

A case study methodology was used for this qualitative study. A case study is "…an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in 'real life'" (Simons, 2009, as cited in Starman, 2013, p. 32). Since this study explored the multiple unique experiences and perspectives of teachers across several alternative education sites, the case study design was an appropriate choice for this study. Though all the teachers in this study do not teach in at the same site or have the same day-to-day experiences, they all teach in similar specialized settings: alternative public high schools.

Case studies are typically used to answer how and why questions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The research questions of this study sought to understand how and why teachers' perceptions of their alternative students direct their instructional choices and how they perceive these practices promote and/or deter student academic success. Case studies are also used when the participants' behavior is not manipulated (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The participants' (alternative high school teachers) behaviors were not manipulated in order to elicit survey responses that reveal genuine perceptions.

The study was designed as an exploratory case study using an open-ended survey. Exploratory studies investigate situations or experiences by using "…an intervention with no clear, single set of outcomes" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 548) in order to identify research questions for a future larger study (Davey, 1991). Since this study targeted a select group of participants (alternative high school teachers) bounded by their unique experiences (teaching in

alternative high schools), an exploratory case study using an open-ended survey was an opportunity to capture and analyze circumstances that are the purpose and conceptual framework of this study. The open-ended surveys allowed the researcher to obtain data on a wider number of outcomes (teacher experiences teaching in an alternative high school) that can be researched further in the future (Baxter, & Jack, 2008). Each teacher's unique perspective and its influence on his/her instructional choices was compared with those of the other teachers across sites in this study.

Participants

Since alternative schools predominantly serve at-risk students, this study examined public school teachers that teach in alternative high schools. Alternative schools can serve kindergarten through 12th grade students or serve specific grade levels, such as kindergarten through 5th grade students, 6th through 8th grade students, or 6th grade through 12th grade students. Other schools like charter schools, magnet schools, early college high schools, and some private schools may consider themselves as alternative. To ensure the participants matched the targeted sample of this study, selection criteria were that the participant be: (a) a public school teacher, who (b) teaches in an alternative high school, and (c) teaches at-risk students whose alternative school assignment was due to their previous history of trouble with academics, behavior, or completion of coursework. The selection criteria stemmed from the research questions, literature, and conceptual framework of this study. Appropriate demographic data on the teachers, such as years of teaching experience, previous program experiences, and academic degrees, were provided after the participants were identified.

After obtaining consent forms (Appendix A) from these participants, the researcher examined anonymous survey responses from teachers that teach high school courses in public

alternative high schools that matched the student demographic and school purpose outlined in chapter one and two. All eligible public alternative high school teachers were informed of the study through social media channels like LinkedIn and Facebook. Information communicated through these channels informed participants that their identities would be kept confidential.

Participants' Rights

Participation in this study was completely voluntary. Participants were able to remove themselves from the study at any time and were allowed to do so without repercussions. All participants electronically signed a consent form prior to completing the survey that outlined the privacy and confidentiality protections for this study. Participants were also allowed to ask to have the consent form read aloud to them. This consent outlined the participant protections for the study and included the study's title, information regarding the principal investigator, the purpose of the study, the study's sample, the requirements of the participants, the benefits and risks involved in the study, and the researcher's contact information. Participants who electronically signed the consent form were then prompted to begin the survey. Participants were informed that they were allowed to print a copy of the consent form for their own records. The researcher kept copies of the digital consent forms password protected. The consent forms will be kept for at least three years before being destroyed.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary method of this study was to conduct anonymous surveys with all teacher participants. The methodology of this study was designed to account for (a) alternative high school teacher perceptions of alternative students' abilities and alternative education; (b) alternative high school teacher's experiences in promoting the academic success of their alternative, at-risk students; (c) alternative high school teachers' perceptions and their influence

on their instructional choices; and (d) instructional practices that promote the academic success of alternative, at-risk students. To study these topics, the researcher conducted data collection and analysis in three phases: invitation to participate, administration of individual surveys, and causal analysis.

Invitation to Participate

Each participant received a link to a digital form. The form included the consent form to allow participants time to review it and formulate any questions they might have had regarding it. In addition to consent, the form also outlined the selection criteria for this study to confirm that the teachers were qualifying participants for this study. Participants were able to contact the researcher with these questions prior to submitting the form. After reading the consent form, the participants were prompted to begin the survey. The form included an agreement statement that informed participants that by submitting the survey, they acknowledged their understanding of the research description and the risks and benefits involved in participating. The statement also informed the participant that, by submitting the survey, they agreed to voluntarily participate in the study. Participants were given a one-week window to complete the survey. Participants had the opportunity to complete the form and survey in private in the location of their choosing to maintain confidentiality in choosing to participate in the study. These forms were created with Google Forms and responses were collected with Google Forms. A hardcopy of this form is included in the Appendices (Appendix B).

Anonymous Surveys

Once participants digitally signed the consent form, participants were prompted to begin the anonymous survey. Each individual survey took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. Participants had one week to complete the surveys. Surveys were disseminated via Google

Forms and were conducted during the Spring 2018 semester. Since there are new students and staff added to the school roster at the start of each semester, this allowed enough time for teachers to become familiar with their students. Disseminating surveys at this time also helped with obtaining more accurate responses from participants as responses at the beginning of a semester might have been based more on first impressions. Responses at the end of the semester might have been influenced by stresses attributed to final exams. All materials were kept off-site. Digital materials were password-protected and hardcopy materials were locked in a filing cabinet. Only the researcher had access to these materials.

Survey Questions. The survey consisted of 28 predetermined, open-ended and close-ended questions that stemmed from the research questions and conceptual framework of this study. Definitions were provided for the participant as necessary. Questions regarding perceptions and practices were open-ended to allow teachers to elaborate on the perspectives and practices they felt were most accurately representative of themselves or were most important. Questions regarding chosen practices asked teachers to rate their effectiveness on a Likert scale from strongly effective to least effective. Anonymous teacher surveys covered topics such as their perceptions of alternative education, alternative students, alternative students' abilities, instructional choices, and instructional practices. Many of the teachers had prior teaching experience at traditional schools; therefore, survey questions regarding their demographics (Set 1), their perspectives of alternative education (Set 2) and alternative students (Set 3) helped the researcher gain insight into teachers' perspectives of their own students. Survey questions regarding student abilities (Set 4) and teacher instructional practices (Set 5) were intended to provide understanding of the teachers' perspectives of their assigned students and the effectiveness of their instructional practices. Since alternative schools are different from

traditional schools, some teachers may or may not have changed their instructional approaches starting employment in alternative high schools after from coming from other schools. For this reason, survey questions regarding instructional practices (Set 5) and instructional choices (Set 6) aided the researcher in determining perspectives, factors, or reasons for any changes to instruction. The researcher focused specifically on the perspectives that influenced teacher instructional choices as well as the specific instructional practices used.

Questions were organized in sets that were sequenced from general to more specific. Each question set derived from a topic from one of the research questions of this study. Questions were in sets to ensure the survey remained organized and focused on one topic at a time. Each set then was sequenced from general to specific. Sequencing questions in this manner allowed teachers to respond to the topics as whole and then relate it to personal experiences. This sequencing also allowed the researcher to capture more explicit responses. As a result, the researcher could interpret the teachers' responses more accurately. A copy of the survey questions is included in the Appendices (Appendix C.

Survey response analysis. The researcher read survey responses and coded them into categories using open and axial coding (Creswell, 2013). In open coding, the survey responses were analyzed by determining what replies meant and then labeling them with reoccurring themes (Creswell, 2013; Grinter, n.d.). These responses and their themes were then organized into categories (Creswell, 2013; Grinter, n.d.). The survey responses were then coded through axial coding where conclusions were made about the connections between categories (Creswell, 2013; Grinter, n.d.). Axial coding can consist of examining the conditions, contexts, actions, and interactions, and/or consequences that bring about the categories identified during open coding (Grinter, n.d.).

While open coding, this study's survey responses were coded using pre-determined categories: teacher perceptions, teacher instructional choices, and effective instructional practices for engaging at-risk youth. Subcategories for teachers' perceptions and teacher instructional choices included student abilities; student behavior; type of course (Honors, AP, tested, non-tested); subject area; teaching philosophy; and class demographics (number of students, student gender ratio, student races). Teacher perceptions of student abilities and teacher instructional choices stemmed from these categories. Subcategories for effective instructional practices for engaging at-risk youth included critical thinking, integrated curriculum, project-based learning, scaffolding, frequent monitoring of academic performance, and mentoring. All categories and sub-categories derived from the conceptual framework and literature review of this study. Additional codes for other categories and sub-categories were used when they were revealed during open coding. After open coding, axial coding was used to relate teachers' perceptions of students' abilities with chosen instructional practices (Creswell, 2013). These coded responses were then separated into two pools of data: positive perceptions of their students' abilities and negative perceptions of their students' abilities.

Causal Analysis

Open-ended survey data were compared with the Likert scale survey data. By comparing the Likert scale data to the free response data, the responses regarding perceptions and practices were compared to responses regarding the perceived effectiveness of practices to confirm the perceptions and practices of alternative school teachers that promoted and/or deterred the academic success of at-risk students. Teachers who held positive perceptions of their students and employ the practices outlined in the literature validated the conceptual framework of this study if the data indicated the teachers felt their practices promoted the academic success of their

at-risk students. Responses of participants who held positive perceptions and employed the practices outlined in the literature review, but did not feel their practices promoted the academic success of their at-risk students, were described. If any relationships between teacher perceptions of student abilities and teacher practices did not validate the conceptual framework of this study, they were reported in the study's findings to maintain transparency and objectivity. Anonymous teacher survey data identified the teachers' perceptions and resulting instructional designs. As a result of analyzing the data, this researcher also identified which teacher practices were perceived as most effective in increasing the academic success of at-risk students in an alternative setting.

Potential Limitations

All studies have limitations. Limitations of this study include: qualitative studies cannot be generalized and applied to large demographics the same way that quantitative studies can (Atieno, 2009; Davey, 1991). Quantitative studies utilize statistical analysis to determine if data reveals a clear outcome or a simple possibility whereas qualitative studies do not (Atieno, 2009). Another limitation of qualitative research is the vagueness of words (Atieno, 2009). Most qualitative research utilizes interview or survey responses, so participants may use language with multiple meanings. These multiple meanings are left to the researcher to interpret and manipulate (Atieno, 2009). Because qualitative research deals more with words than numbers, the focus is not to record the number of times certain language is used, but rather recognize when certain language shows a trend (Atieno, 2009).

In terms of qualitative case studies, exploratory case studies have limitations as well. It is typical for case studies to have large amounts of data that require analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008). With large amounts of data, it may be difficult for researchers to maintain focus and organization

of data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Another limitation for exploratory case studies is that they are usually conducted before implementing a wide-reaching research study (Davey, 1991). While this approach may be benefit those who implement the wide-reaching study by setting the work in motion, it is also an exploratory case study's limitation as researchers can report the findings as cogent conclusions when it may be too early to form premises (Davey, 1991). Exploratory case studies also tend to lack in representation of diversity (Davey, 1991).

Assumptions

Since the chosen method includes anonymous surveys, this study assumed the following regarding survey responses: (a) all participants met the outlined selection criteria, (b) all participants provided authentic responses; (c) survey questions were written in a manner that was understandable by all participants; (d) survey questions were written and asked in a manner that was not leading; (e) participants' responses were impartial and were not influenced by internal or external factors, such as interactions that occurred before taking the survey, personal experiences, stresses, etc.

This study made a theoretical assumption that all teachers' practices were impacted by their perceptions of their students' abilities and that all students are impacted by teacher perceptions of student abilities (Bernstein et al., 2014; Johnson, 2017; Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017; Stein & Hussong, 2007). In terms of the topic of alternative schools and its students, this study assumed alternative schools serve students at-risk of failure or dropout due to academics, attendance, or behavior ("At-Risk," 2013; McGee & Lin, 2017) as it is evident in the literature of this study.

As a former participant researcher, instructional coach, and teacher at an alternative high school, the participants and topic selections were intentional and personal. While the researcher

has professional connections to the chosen study topic, potential biases were recognized. Additionally, the researcher used reflexive journaling throughout the collection and analysis processes to self-monitor and self-evaluate practices to maintain objectivity and consider alternate approaches, as needed (Barry & O'Callaghan, 2008).

Conclusion

The chosen method for this study was a qualitative, exploratory case study using an open-ended survey because the study focused on one group, bounded by their unique experiences, and the influence of their various perspectives on their instructional choices. Anonymous teacher surveys were disseminated, coded, and separated into two pools based on types of perception. Likert scale data regarding perceptions of instructional practices' effectiveness were compared to determine alignment with teacher perceptions of student abilities and instructional choices. The next chapter reports the findings and results of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to investigate a sample of public alternative high school teachers' perceptions of their at-risk students' abilities, how these perceptions influenced their instructional practices, and how they perceived those practices to support at-risk student academic success across public alternative high schools. The researcher believed that an understanding of these perceptions and their influences on their instructional practices allowed alternative high school educators to inform their own instructional practices for their at-risk students. Participants in the study included nine alternative public high school teachers from different sites whose experiences ranged from six to twenty-six years. Six of the participants in this study previously taught in non-alternative schools and three of the participants only had experience teaching in alternative schools. All nine participants earned a bachelor's degree, and seven also earned a master's degree. This chapter discusses the major findings obtained from nine surveys detailing participants' shared experiences across different alternative high school sites. Six major findings emerged from this study:

1. All of the participants perceived alternative education as a means to serve students who were not successful in a traditional school setting.
2. The participants who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities held more positive perceptions of their instruction's effectiveness than the participants who held negative perceptions of their students' abilities.
3. The majority of participants indicated that their instructional choices are influenced by student engagement.

4. The majority of participants who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities employed the instructional practice of scaffolding in their classrooms.
5. Participants who discussed monitoring of student performance as an instructional practice were also those who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities.
6. The majority of participants, both those who held positive and negative perceptions of their students' abilities, employed collaboration.

The following sections discuss the findings with evidence that supports and explains each finding. Through open and axial coding (Creswell, 2013), the researcher hoped to capture the perceptions and practices of alternative school teachers in promoting and/or deterring the academic success of at-risk students. Quotations from open-ended survey responses were used to illustrate participant perspectives. Likert scale responses were used with the open-ended responses to support the presentation of findings.

Analysis Method

Survey responses were analyzed through open-coding and annotated using pre-determined categories: teacher perceptions, teacher instructional choices, and effective instructional practices for engaging at-risk youth. Subcategories for teachers' perceptions and teacher instructional choices included student abilities; student behavior, type of course, subject area, teaching philosophy, and class demographics (number of students, student gender ratio, student races). Subcategories for effective instructional practices for engaging at-risk youth included critical thinking, integrated curriculum, project-based learning, collaboration, scaffolding, frequent monitoring of academic performance, and mentoring. The following additional codes for other categories and sub-categories were revealed and used during open coding: external factors, personal rewards, individualized learning, and relationships.

After open coding, the researcher defined positive and negative perceptions based on the literature reviewed in this study. Positive teacher perceptions of student abilities outlined in the literature included views that students paid attention, put forth effort, were well-behaved, were motivated, and/or were easy to teach (Glock, 2016; Jovanovic et al., 2014; Timmermans et al., 2016). Negative teacher perceptions of student abilities outlined in the literature included views that students were disruptive, low achieving, and/or hard to teach (Glock, 2016; Jovanovic et al., 2014). Axial coding was then used to relate teachers' perceptions of students' abilities with chosen instructional practices (Creswell, 2013). Using the existing literature as a guide, the coded responses were labeled and separated into two pools of data: positive perceptions of their students' abilities and negative perceptions of their students' abilities.

Teacher Perceptions of Student Ability

During analysis, careful attention was paid to participant word choices. These word choices were compared to the definitions outlined by the literature in this study. Through this comparison, the research found that, of the nine participants, five held positive perceptions of their students' abilities and four held negative perceptions of their students' abilities.

Positive perceptions. Teachers who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities described their students in the following ways:

> "They are not bad kids…[their abilities] are not much different than the range of students found in the district as a whole."
>
> "…even though science is not their favorite subject, they are willing to work hard and be actively engaged…I think our students are capable of being successful."
>
> "They look, act, learn, or react differently than your typical traditional student but really they are just the same as all other students…"

"Our students are traditional students. They just happen to have extenuating circumstances that cause them to need extra support to achieve their goals. We are the alternative, not them."

"[The abilities of the students on my roster are] very dynamic. They can be high performing to low performing."

The participants above described their students using words and phrases like "willing to work hard," "not bad kids," and "same as all other students," which aligned with how the literature defined positive perceptions (Glock, 2016; Jovanovic et al., 2014; Timmermans et al., 2016). The majority of participants held positive perceptions of their students' abilities.

Negative perceptions. Teachers who held negative perceptions of their students' abilities described their students in the following ways:

"Many students are able to access the content once they feel safe and regulated. Others continue to be impacted by inattention, drug use, and mental health issues keeping them dysregulated…Take the bottom 2 or 3 students from each [traditional school] class that are not being successful, those are the students who come to alt ed. The skill set is lower at alt ed for about half, but not all."

"…the students are becoming increasingly apathetic, and I am finding it harder and harder to motivate them at all…I wish I could make more of them care."

"I have also developed a great deal of patience because I have to outlast resistant students…All of the students on my current roster have significant gaps in their reading and math skills that make it difficult for them to access grade level curricula…We educate them within a school-to-college framework—when they would be better served if their innate abilities were mined and developed."

"It is a big mix from my 9th graders up to my 12th graders. I have a couple 9th graders I am recommending they exit our program from next year. I have a few 12th graders I am really worried about not graduating because of their ability and effort to seek additional support."

The participants above described their students using words and phrases like "impacted by inattention," "apathetic," and "resistant" which aligned with how the literature defined negative perceptions (Glock, 2016; Jovanovic et al., 2014). A minority of participants held negative perceptions of their students' abilities.

Findings

The open-ended survey data was then compared with the Likert scale survey data. The Likert scale data was compared to the free response data to determine the connection between the perceptions of alternative school teachers and their practices that promote and/or deter the academic success of at-risk students. This Likert scale data identified which practices teachers perceived as most effective in increasing the academic success of their alternative at-risk students. Six themes emerged from the comparison of data.

Finding 1: All of the participants perceived alternative education as a means to serve students who were not successful in a traditional school setting.

One key finding in this study was that all nine participants felt alternative education's purpose was to provide an education to students whose needs were not met in a traditional school setting. Participants described alternative education in the following ways:

"Alternative education is education provided for students who are unsuccessful in the traditional classroom…students who are not able to function appropriately in the

traditional classroom…to free the traditional classroom from students who are impeding the education of others."

"…an avenue for a student who needs something different…to meet the needs of the diverse learners who are not able to find success at a large school that has an industrialized, one size fits all, approach to learning."

"When you provide learning opportunities outside of the norm. To provide learning opportunities for those who struggle to fit the mold set by the local community."

"The purpose of alternative education is to bridge gaps and meet students where they are in a non-traditional setting."

"[A] venue where students who don't fit into the mainstream can receive an education."

"A setting designed for students who are unable to thrive in a mainstream school environment."

"An education that is designed to meet the needs of students who have not done well in a traditional setting."

"…an environment where students who have fallen through the cracks are given a second change to be successful. To meet the learning needs of students who cannot find success in a traditional setting."

"…an alternative environment, somehow separate from the traditional school, that can better meet our student population's needs."

Participants compared alternative schools and students to traditional schools and students to express how they perceived alternative education's purposes. Careful attention was paid to references like "molds," "mainstream," "non-traditional," and "something different" to determine whether participants' perceptions were positive or negative.

Alternative education as a matter of state policy. Though nine out of nine participants perceived alternative education as an alternative means to provide students with an opportunity at success and though eight out of nine expressed positive perceptions of their schools' effectiveness, seven of nine participants held negative perceptions of their state's support, or lack thereof, for alternative education. These participants described above stated their perceptions in the following ways:

> "I think there needs to be a shift in thinking, and to embrace more public alternative ed sites…The students today are looking for something different. Let's make it happen for them."
>
> "I think that the state should support alternative schools more. In many cases they are used as holding facilities or dumping grounds for kids with severe behavioral problems. Since students constantly enter and exit, it can be difficult for teachers to plan and implement effective lessons. Additional training and resources should be provided."
>
> "The state needs to provide the funding and the idea that not all students are able to get through school through a traditional means and will need additional supports."
>
> "It is extremely important for students and families to have the option of alternative education. There should be more incentive [from the state] for districts to support alternative programs."
>
> "I do not think state policy makers understand that a need for alternative education is not a weakness. I believe state policy should consider the whole child when providing funding and setting expectations."

"In a perfect world, all schools would be 'alternative' schools. However, the state is never going to pay for that kind of individualized instruction for all students. The state seems to be unclear as to what exactly alternative education is and who it should serve."

One participant held a positive perception and stated:

"I think it is a positive state policy to include strong alternative programs for the state in which it is implemented. I feel strongly that it fosters success for students who would not have graduated or would have dropped out if not for alternative learning environments."

The remaining participant's response was not positive or negative as they stated they did not understand the question.

Participants used words and phrases like "needs a shift in thinking," "support alternative schools more," "provide funding," "need for alternative education is not a weakness," and "never going to pay" to negatively describe their states' policies and understandings of alternative education. Despite expressing their positive perceptions of their schools' effectiveness in serving alternative students, participants expressed negative perceptions of their state's policies on alternative education.

Finding 2: The participants who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities held more positive perceptions of their instruction's effectiveness than the participants who held negative perceptions of their students' abilities.

Another finding in this study was that of the five teachers who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities, two rated their instructional choices as strongly effective and three rated their instructional practices as effective. Of the four teachers who held negative perceptions of their students' abilities one rated his/her instructional choices as strongly effective, two rated their instructional choices as effective, and two rated their instructional choices as somewhat

effective. Participants rated their instructional practices on a Likert scale from strongly ineffective to strongly effective and did not elaborate on the justifications for these ratings. Participant responses came exclusively from these Likert scale ratings.

Finding 3: The majority of participants indicated that their instructional choices are influenced by student engagement and student needs.

Another significant finding of this study was that the majority of participants indicated that their instructional choices are influenced by student engagement: eight of nine. Teachers indicated students' level of interest, motivation, and input were factors which teachers considered when determining the instructional practices to use. Although eight of nine participants discussed student engagement as an influential factor in their instructional choices, four of these eight participants indicated student needs as another factor. Rather than students' needs as an additional factor to student engagement, two of the eight participants shared that student ability was a factor. Though students' needs and students' abilities as an influential factor in the participants' instructional choices are reported separately, many participants used these phrases in similar ways and some used them in different ways. One participant stated he/she based his/her instructional choices on students' demonstrated needs. Another participant stated a major factor that influenced his/her instructional choices was student ability and that he/she "do[es his/her] best to teach to [his/her students'] needs." It is unclear if some teachers meant to use these phrases interchangeably or dissimilarly.

Experiences teaching in an alternative setting. While participants reported their instructional choices were based on student needs and abilities, five participants reported teaching in an alternative school impacted their instruction positively and two participants reported no change to their instruction. Of the remaining two participants, one participant

reported negative feelings towards his/her experiences in teaching in alternative school and one reported "N/A." The same participant who reported "N/A" also reported he/she did not have any other teaching experiences. Participants who reported that teaching in an alternative setting positively impacted their instruction expressed it in the following ways:

> "It is completely different. Content is important, but so is [students'] social emotional [wellbeing].
>
> "I feel like I have grown more at the alternative school though because the focus isn't so heavy on test scores."
>
> "Teaching in the alternative setting, I have more say in how I run my classroom as well as I am able to work more one-on-one with my students to truly help them to be successful."
>
> "[Teaching alternative students is] Much more rewarding and has given me the strength to teach at higher levels."
>
> "…Alternative schools focused a good deal more on building relationships with students than traditional school did."

Of the above five participants, three held negative perceptions of their students' abilities and two held positive perceptions of their students' abilities.

The two participants who reported no change to their instruction stated:

> "Not much difference [in teaching alternative students]."
>
> "[My experiences teaching alternative students is] similar [to teaching students at my previous schools]."

Both of the above participants held positive perceptions of their students' abilities.

The one participant who reported negative feelings regarding teaching in an alternative setting reported:

"[Student] motivation tends to be lower…"

The majority of participants described their experiences in teaching in alternative settings in a positive way. Participants used positive words and phrases like "completely different," "grown more," "I have more say," "given me strength," and "good deal more" to describe their experiences.

Internal and external influences. Though participants reported student needs and abilities as factors that influenced their instructional practices, teachers perceived the abilities of their students to be outside of their control. This was a major finding because the majority of participants felt their students' abilities were influenced by outside factors: six out of nine. Three of the six participants described their perception of alternative students' abilities as fixed. These participants described alternative students' abilities in the following ways:

"Some are a bit slow academically. Some are brilliant…I have one student with a 97 in average in my class; I have another with a 24."

"They can be high performing to low performing."

"Alternative students are of average or above average ability."

"I would say that each student tends to have strengths that are above average and weaknesses that are below average so they tend to be really good at some things and very weak in other areas."

Based on participant responses, the majority of participants felt alternative students' abilities were fixed and/or were influenced by external factors such as students' demographics, previous academic experiences, and personal lives.

Externally influenced. Four of the six participants perceived that alternative students' abilities were influenced by students' demographics, previous academic experiences, and/or personal lives. These participants described alternative students' abilities in the following ways:

> "[Alternative students' abilities are] Extremely varied depending on each student's circumstance."
>
> "Academically many of our students are far below grade reading level…However, we also serve a high number of students with great academic abilities. For those students home life has been their most challenging obstacle in finding academic success."
>
> "[Some students] continue to be impacted by inattention, drug use, and mental health issues keeping them dysregulated."
>
> "When comparing our students to the model of the traditional student, I believe their greatest obstacles are limited global life experiences. I believe this leads to a limited vision of their own future."

Participants made references such as "circumstance," "home life," "inattention, drug use, and mental health," and "limited global life experiences." These references were used to group these participant responses as those who believed their students' abilities to be influenced by factors outside of themselves.

Internally influenced. While these four participants perceived their students' abilities to be influenced by outside factors, two of them stated their students' abilities were within their realm of influence. The participants conveyed this perception when they stated:

> "Many students are able to access the content once they feel safe and regulated."
>
> "…Based on our students' life experiences they have a skill set that if sharpened could be used to change their profile from at-risk to successful. The grit they need to survive at

home and in their neighborhoods can be transferred to traditional success with the right guidance from educators."

Participant references to "once they feel safe and regulated" and "they have a skill set that if sharpened could be used to change their profile" supported that the participants felt students' learning environments influenced their abilities. Since it is the teacher that creates the learning environment, their responses support they believe student abilities can be influenced by the teacher (Johnson, 2014).

Finding 4: The majority of participants who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities also employed the instructional practice of scaffolding in their classrooms.

Participants reported three instructional practices they used most often in their classrooms and rated them on a Likert scale of "strongly ineffective" to "strongly effective." A number of practices were reported more than once. Two out of nine participants reported teacher-student relationships; two out of nine reported online learning; five of nine referenced or reported collaboration; four out of nine referenced or reported monitoring student performance; five out of nine referenced or reported scaffolding. The instructional practices that were reported once included individual work, reflection on instruction, complimenting students, hands-on learning, classroom management, learning styles, accommodated learning, think alouds, growth mindset, and close reading.

Participants who stated "collaboration," "Kagan," "Round table activities," and "Project-Based Learning" were grouped as "collaboration;" collaboration plays a large role in Kagan, round table activities, and Project-Based Learning (Kagan, 2018; Buck Institute for Education, 2017). Those who stated "differentiation," "individualized instruction," and "student feedback"

were grouped as "monitoring student performance" as all of these instructional practices require the teacher's awareness of student academic progress (Safer & Fleischman, 2005). Participants who stated "scaffolding" or "Gradual Release of Responsibility" were grouped as "scaffolding" since "Gradual Release of Responsibility" utilizes scaffolding (Fisher and Frey, 2013).

A commonality shared by the majority of the participants (5 of 9) who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities was the use of scaffolding in instruction. Out of the five participants that held positive perceptions, three participants stated "scaffolding" and one participant stated "Gradual Release of Responsibility" as an instructional practice they use most often. The "Gradual Release of Responsibility" uses scaffolding (Fisher and Frey, 2013) and was categorized as such during open-coding. Participants who used scaffolding rated its effectiveness at a 4 (effective) or higher. There was one participant, who held a negative perception, that also stated he/she used scaffolding. This participant rated its effectiveness at a 4 (effective).

Finding 5: Participants who discussed monitoring of student performance as an instructional practice were also those who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities.

Another finding that emerged was that four of five participants who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities were also those who used frequent monitoring of student performance. The participants stated they used differentiation, individualized instruction, and student feedback. Differentiation and individualized instruction both require the teacher knowing the progress of the students in order to adjust instruction to meet the needs of students (Basye, 2018). Providing students with feedback refers to giving students information as to how they are progressing in achieving their goals (Wiggins, 2012). Knowing the progress of students requires

the monitoring student performance (Safer & Fleischman, 2005). Based on this research, the participants' responses were coded as frequent monitoring of student performance. All four of these participants rated the effectiveness of these practices as a strongly effective. Participants who held negative perceptions of their students' abilities did not state they utilized this instructional practice. One participant who held a negative perception of his/her students' abilities stated he/she used "individualized work;" however, the participant did not elaborate as to whether or not he/she meant this to be synonymous with individualized learning or meant this as assigned independent work.

Finding 6: The majority of participants (5 of 9) employed collaboration, including those who held positive (2 of 5) and negative perceptions (3 of 4) of their students' abilities.

Five out of nine participants referenced collaboration as an instructional practice they employed most often in their classrooms; two of these five participants held positive perceptions of their students' abilities and three of these five participants held negative perceptions of their students abilities. Two participants stated they used collaboration, one stated he/she used Kagan, one participant stated he/she used Project-Based Learning (PBL), and another participant stated he/she used "…round table activities to promote interaction and teambuilding…" Kagan, a cooperative learning program, and Project-Based Learning both utilize collaboration (Kagan, 2018; Buck Institute for Education, 2017). Using this research, these responses were coded accordingly. Two of the five participants rated this instructional practice as somewhat effective. and three of the five participants rated this instructional practice as effective.

Summary of Findings

This chapter presented the seven major findings revealed by this study. Data from anonymous surveys uncovered participants' perceptions of their at-risk students, their chosen

instructional practices, and their perceptions of these practices' effectiveness in promoting the academic success of their at-risk students. Samples of participants' responses were included in the report to increase the researcher's transparency and to accurately represent the participants' views on the topic under study.

The findings in this study indicated that public alternative high school teachers perceive alternative education as a means to providing at-risk students with an education different from the traditional school setting (Horsford & Powell, 2016; Jones, 2015). Findings also indicated that public alternative high school teachers' perceptions of their at-risk students' abilities tend to be reflected in positive or negative terms (Garza, 2012; Jovanovic et al., 2014). It was suggested that, regardless of these teachers' perceptions, teachers believed that students' ability is fixed and/or impacted by factors outside of their control. The majority of teachers felt students' abilities were not within their realm of instructional impact. The data also indicated that positive or negative perceptions of student abilities may have some influence over teacher's instructional choices and their perceptions of the effectiveness of these instructional choices. The teachers who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities rated the effectiveness of their instructional practices higher (effective or strongly effective) than teachers who held negative perceptions of their students' abilities. The teachers who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities rated their instructional choices as effective or higher. Teachers who held negative perceptions of their students' abilities rated their instructional choices as somewhat effective or higher. Participants did not elaborate on the justifications for these ratings.

The findings implied that teachers who hold positive perceptions of their students' abilities are more likely to employ practices (collaboration, scaffolding, and frequent monitoring of student performance) supported by the literature in this study (Holms, 2016; La Porte, 2016;

McGee & FanYu, 2017; Morrow & Torrez, 2012; Swanson & Nagy, 2014; Zhang et al. 2014) than those who hold negative perceptions. However, the data also suggested that regardless of the teacher's perspectives, student engagement and student needs are the most common influences on teacher's instructional choices.

Since three of the practices of teachers with positive perceptions were supported in the literature review of this study (collaboration, scaffolding, and frequent monitoring of student performance) (Holms, 2016; La Porte, 2016; McGee & FanYu, 2017; Morrow & Torrez, 2012; Swanson & Nagy, 2014; Zhang et al. 2014) *and* since there was also support in the literature that a student's level of engagement can be directly influenced by a teacher's perception of student abilities (Bernstein et al., 2014; Johnson, 2017; Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017; Stein & Hussong, 2007; VanDeWeghe, 2003), there may be a link between teachers' positive perceptions of students' abilities and the use of effective instructional practices. Considering this study's findings surrounding teacher's perceptions of students' abilities and the realm of their instructional influence, and the literature supporting the need for educators to transition away from focusing on outside factors and more on internal factors like effective teaching and learning practices (Milner, Murray, & Farinde, 2015; Popp et al., 2011), understanding the possible link between teachers' perceptions of students' abilities and chosen instructional practices can lead to a greater understanding of how to increase the success of at-risk students in alternative settings. The next chapter provides an interpretation of the findings, implications of the findings and recommendations for action and further study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to document and interpret how alternative school teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities influenced their instructional practices and how they perceived those practices to support at-risk student academic success in public alternative high schools. This study sought to gain a better understanding of the factors that influenced teacher's perceptions of alternative student abilities and the factors that influenced a teacher's instructional choices in order to increase alternative school teachers' awareness of how their perceptions may direct the practices and supports they provide their at-risk students as well as how to support implementation of applicable practices in their education of the at-risk students at their sites.

This study used an exploratory case study to collect qualitative data by conducting anonymous surveys. The data were coded and analyzed using categories grounded in the research questions and conceptual framework of this study. Categories used for coding stemmed directly from each of this study's research questions. These categories were used to code the data and present the findings in Chapter Four. In the data analysis, the researcher initially looked for emerging patterns among the categories. In another level of analysis, the research from the literature review of this study was used to challenge or confirm the patterns found in the data.

Chapter Four presented the major findings of this study by organizing qualitative data from survey responses by the research questions from this study. This chapter aims to provide an interpretation of these findings while also considering the literature surrounding alternative education, teachers, and students. This chapter concludes with the possible implications of the results of this study as well as recommendations for action and further study.

Interpretation of Findings

After a careful analysis of the survey responses from the snapshots provided in chapter four, major responses emerged that spoke to the research questions of this study and are organized in this manner:

Finding 1 provided data to answer the research question: What are alternative school high school teachers' perceptions of alternative students' abilities and alternative education? Finding 1 revealed that the majority of alternative school teachers perceived their students' abilities in a positive light and described the factors that contributed to teacher perceptions of student abilities. This is labeled as Response 1.

Finding 3 provides data to answer the research question: How do alternative high school teachers describe their experiences in promoting the academic success of their at-risk students? Finding 3 uncovered that alternative high school teachers made instructional choices based on their perceptions of their students' abilities and described the factors that influenced teacher's instructional choices. This is labeled as Response 2.

Findings 4, 5, and 6 provided data to answer the research question: How do alternative high school teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities influence their instructional choices? These findings made known that alternative high school teachers, who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities, were more likely to employ effective instructional practices supported by the literature in this study. The findings described the link between teacher perceptions of student abilities and instructional practices. This is labeled as Response 3.

Findings 2 and 3 provided data for the last research question: How do alternative high school teachers perceive their practices to support at-risk student academic success? Findings 2 and 3 showed that alternative high school teachers who held positive perceptions of their

students' abilities were more likely to rate their instruction as effective and described the practices teachers deemed effective in promoting the success of their students. This is labeled as Response 4.

Response 1: What are alternative school high school teachers' perceptions of alternative students' abilities and alternative education?

The majority of alternative school teachers perceived their students' abilities in a positive light. Participants indicated that alternative school students had the same abilities as their traditional school peers, but had extenuating circumstances that prevented them from being successful in a traditional school setting and that alternative education helped them achieve success. One participant response aligned with this view when he/she stated: "I believe [alternative education] is by far superior in that each child is looked at and educated as an individual, not as a statistic in a school of 3,000…[alternative students] have academic and social needs that are not being met by a traditional school, so they seek an alternative to find success." Jones (2015) and Horsford & Powell's (2016) research corroborated this perspective as they explained that the purpose of alternative schools is to provide at-risk students with a different approach to education to ensure their academic success and completion.

Additionally, the majority of participants described their students as willing to work hard, be engaged, and/or were capable of being academically successful. One teacher stated her students, "would be just as successful at another school because [she] is teaching the course in the same way [she] did when [she] worked at a traditional school." This was consistent with the literature in that researchers found teachers who held positive perceptions of their at-risk students described them as diligent, motivated, attentive, and well-behaved (Jovanovic et al., 2014, p. 230; Timmermans et al., 2016, p. 221).

Response 2: How do alternative high school teachers describe their experiences in promoting the academic success of their at-risk students?

Alternative high school teachers make instructional choices based on their perceptions of their students' abilities. The majority of participants stated their instructional choices were influenced by student engagement and student needs. Because the literature supported that teachers perceive a student's ability based on his/her level of engagement (Timmermans et al., 2016), teachers who state they make instructional choices based on student engagement may be making instructional choices based on their perceptions of student ability. It can be argued that since students' levels of engagement are impacted by the teacher's perception of the students' abilities (Bernstein et al., 2014; Johnson, 2017; Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017; Stein & Hussong, 2007; VanDeWeghe, 2003) and since teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities are formed by factors other than their students' actual abilities, including engagement (Hansen, 2016; Timmermans et al., 2016; Yanisko, 2016), teachers who state they make instructional choices based student engagement may actually be making instructional choices based on inaccurate assumptions of students' ability levels.

While teachers may make instructional choices based on assumptions, the majority of alternative high school teachers did not report negative experiences in teaching alternative students (7 of 9). Since these participants included those that held positive and negative perceptions of their students' abilities (4 positive, 3 negative), the results suggested that regardless of these perceptions, teachers may still report positive or neutral experiences in teaching alternative students. In other words, a teacher could hold negative perceptions of his/her students' abilities, but still feel the experience in working with at-risk youth is a positive one.

Response 3: How do alternative high school teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities influence their instructional choices?

Alternative high school teachers, who hold positive perceptions of their students' abilities, are more likely to employ effective instructional practices. All teachers who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities also frequently monitored student performance and the majority of these teachers also employed scaffolding. Two of the teachers who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities also employed collaboration. All these effective practices are ones supported by the literature of this study. Yanisko (2016) explained this causation saying that teachers who hold positive perceptions of their students provide higher quality instruction than those who hold negative perceptions of their students (Yanisko, 2016). One teacher expressed his/her view on positive perceptions and practices stating:

> [Students] should be exposed to grade level content like any other student, but may need additional interventions for success…Alternative students should not be made to feel 'alternative.' The difference should come in instructional practices…Some of our classes are not as rigorous as they should be.

This teacher's response reflects the research surrounding education in alternative schools that, in alternative schools, students are isolated from adequate educational opportunities and deserve inferior educational opportunities (Dandy et al., 2015; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). Yanisko (2016) also stated that teachers who hold negative perceptions of their students' academic abilities and employ lesser-quality instructional practices that require less critical thinking, collaboration, or problem solving (p. 156). One such teacher explains, "If they come in not ready to do school then we find something a little lighter to focus on." Researchers found the practices teachers used with their students communicates the teachers' perceptions about students'

academic potential and this perception can impact a students' perception of their own abilities and, thus, impact their academic achievement (Levpuscek et al., 2013; Peltenburg & van den Heuvel-Panhuizen, 2012; VanDeWeghe, 2003). If teachers hold negative, but inaccurate perceptions of their alternative students, teachers may be more likely to use ineffective practices that may negatively impact student achievement. However, regardless of whether or not teachers hold inaccurate, but positive perceptions of their alternative students' abilities, they still may utilize effective practices that may positively impact student achievement.

Response 4: How do alternative high school teachers perceive their practices to support at-risk student academic success?

Alternative high school teachers who hold positive perceptions of their students' abilities may be more likely to rate their instruction as effective. The teachers who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities tended to hold more positive perceptions of their instruction's effectiveness than the teachers who held negative perceptions of their students. These perceptions of instructional effectiveness may be attributed to what Glock (2016) described: teachers who positively perceived their students' abilities expressed more enthusiasm and self-confidence in reaching the student (Glock, 2016, p. 502). Glock (2016) felt the opposite must also be true: teachers who negatively perceived their students' abilities express less enthusiasm and self-confidence in their ability to reach the student (Glock, 2016, p. 502). However, regardless of positive or negative perceptions, the majority of teachers felt alternative students' abilities were fixed and/or influenced by external factors. Only two teachers, one who held a negative perception and one who held a positive one, stated their students' abilities could be impacted by their instruction.

Perceptions that Surround Alternative Students' Abilities

Finding 1 of this study is that all teachers perceived alternative education as a means to serve students who were not successful in a traditional school setting. The majority of teachers indicated that they held positive perceptions of their alternative students' abilities. A conclusion that can be drawn is that, although students may be correctly placed in an alternative setting due to their troubled past with academics or behavior, it does not necessarily mean their alternative high school teachers will continue to view them this way. Part of Finding 3 was that the majority of teachers perceived alternative students' abilities to be fixed and/or influenced by external factors. A conclusion that can be drawn is that, although a teacher may positively perceive their students' abilities, it may not mean they believe the students are capable of more growth. Teachers may have positive perceptions of students' abilities, but feel this way because they believe the students' abilities are already set or definite. Teachers may also have positive perceptions of students' abilities, but feel this way because they believe the students' external factors are conducive to their success.

The Link between Perceptions of Student Ability and Instructional Practices

Findings 4, 5, and 6 were that teachers who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities were more likely to employ effective practices supported by the literature in this study. There were some teachers who held negative perceptions of their students' abilities and employed effective practices, like scaffolding and collaboration. However, there was a greater number of teachers who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities and employed one or more of the effective practices of scaffolding, frequent monitoring of student performance, and scaffolding. Since the literature supports positive teacher perceptions of student abilities reflect a value for students that pay attention, put forth effort, are well-behaved, are motivated,

and/or are easy to teach (Glock, 2016; Jovanovic et al., 2014; Timmermans et al., 2016) and teachers who hold positive perceptions of their students employ higher-quality instruction (Yanisko, 2016), a conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that teachers reported positive perceptions of their students' abilities because their students may have exhibited more engagement, motivation, effort, assignment completion, and good behavior due to the use of these instructional practices. The opposite was also a conclusion: teachers who report negative perceptions of their students' abilities may have done so because their students exhibited less engagement, motivation, effort, assignment completion, and good behavior due to the lack of use of these instructional practices. Negative teacher perceptions of student abilities outlined in the literature included views that students were disruptive, low achieving, and/or hard to teach (Glock, 2016; Jovanovic et al., 2014).

The Link between Perceptions of Student Ability and Instructional Effectiveness

Finding 2 was that the teachers who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities reported more positive perceptions of their instruction's effectiveness than those who held negative perceptions of their students' abilities. Part of Finding 3 was that teachers indicated their instructional choices are influenced by student engagement and needs. One conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that teachers who positively perceive their students' abilities may perceive them this way because they feel their students are "easy to teach" since the research supports teachers perceive students this way based increased student engagement, motivation, effort, assignment completion, and good behavior. In this regard, another conclusion may be that students are "easier to teach" because their engagement, motivation, effort, assignment completion, and behavior is positively influenced by the teacher's positive perceptions and possible resulting instructional practices.

Implications

The conclusions from the analysis address the study's research questions and achieved the purpose of this study. The results of this study have implications for potential positive change in in alternative education settings at the faculty, school, and district levels. At the faculty level, the results of this study may inform teachers about how their perceptions of student abilities and subsequent classroom practices. These findings will help schools better meet the needs of their students. Teachers may also become more aware of how these perceptions might influence the practices and supports they provide to their alternative students. If alternative school teachers make efforts to hold positive perceptions of their students' abilities, they may be more likely to employ some of the effective practices supported by the literature in this study. Employing effective practices like scaffolding, collaboration, and frequent monitoring of student performance promote the academic success of at-risk students (Holms, 2016; La Porte, 2016; McGee & FanYu, 2017; Morrow & Torrez, 2012; Swanson & Nagy, 2014; Zhang et al. 2014). The importance of at-risk student academic success plays a large role in their future socioeconomic mobility (Drotos & Cilesiz, 2014).

At the school level, the results of this study may help alternative school and program administration determine applicable practices to promote in the education of the at-risk students at their sites as well as determine applicable professional learning opportunities to offer the teachers at their sites. Since schools with large numbers of at-risk students, like alternative schools, are more likely to hire ineffectual teachers or teachers with less experience and education (Bascia & Maton, 2016; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; Mason-Williams & Gagnon, 2017), offering professional development on the perceptions and effective practices supported in this study may help improve instruction and, thus, overall school performance.

At the district level, the results of this study may help districts determine what resources and supports to provide the alternative schools in their districts as well as set requirements for school initiatives or school improvement plans. Since the perception of some alternative schools is that they lack sufficient resources (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009), using the results of this study may help districts to determine where and how to allocate funds for alternative schools in their districts.

Recommendations for Action

The researcher offered recommendations based on the findings, analysis, and conclusions of this study for alternative high school teachers, alternative high school administration, and further study.

Recommendations for Alternative High School Teachers

Since the majority of teachers in this study based their instructional choices on perceptions of student engagement and since teachers' perceptions of student ability can be influenced by student engagement (Bernstein et al., 2014; Johnson, 2017; Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017; Stein & Hussong, 2007; VanDeWeghe, 2003), this may mean teachers who state they make instructional choices based student engagement may make instructional choices based on inaccurate assumptions of students' ability levels. Considering teachers who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities also employed effective practices supported by the literature in this study, increasing teachers' awareness of their perceptions of their students' abilities may be beneficial. Based on Findings 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6, alternative high school teachers should:

1. Utilize reflection tools to self-monitor and self-evaluate their perceptions and instructional practices to determine if they hold negative or positive perceptions and if

they employ the effective instructional practices supported by the literature and results of this study. By honestly reflecting on their perceptions and instructional practices, teachers may be able to determine if their perceptions of their students influence their instructional practices and inform their perceptions and instructional practices.

2. Participate in peer observations to determine what perceptions they communicate to their students via their instructional practices. By observing peers, teachers may be able to identify if, when, and/or how often they utilize the effective instructional practices supported by the literature and results of this study. Teachers can use the evidence collected from these observations as well as coaching from their peers to inform their perceptions and instruction.

Recommendations for Alternative High School Administration

Since the participants who held positive perceptions of their students' abilities held more positive perceptions of their instruction's effectiveness and were more likely to employ the instructional practices supported in the literature of this study, the possible link between perceptions of student ability and instructional effectiveness may be of a concern at the school level. With alternative school student performance outcomes remaining stagnant or declining (Horsford & Powell, 2016; Wilkerson, Afacan, Perzigian, Justin, & Lequia, 2016), it may be benefit alternative school leaders to create opportunities for teachers to reflect and improve their perceptions and resulting instructional practices. This may be especially important since the true purpose and perceived purpose of some alternative schools is to provide an alternative approach to education to ensure student academic success and completion (Horsford & Powell, 2016; Jones, 2015). Based on Findings 1 and 2, alternative high school administrators should:

1. Conduct observations to determine what perceptions teachers communicate to students through their instructional practices. In post-observation conferences, administrators and teachers can work together to determine if and/or how classroom instruction should be altered. Administrators can also examine the evidence they collected during observations to determine professional development needs.
2. Provide teachers time for professional learning opportunities to allow them to implement practices deemed necessary from classroom observations.

Recommendations for Further Study

The researcher recommends further study in the following areas to develop the topic of this study and increase the applicability of the results of this study:

1. The survey in this study did not provide participants an opportunity to elaborate on their ratings on the effectiveness of their instructional practices. Due to the limitations of the survey and to elaborate on Finding 2, a study of teachers' perceptions of their instruction's effectiveness should be conducted to support whether or not teachers who hold positive perceptions of their students' abilities report more positive perceptions of their instruction's effectiveness than those who hold negative perceptions of their students' abilities.
2. Based on the limitations of this study and to clarify Finding 3, a survey with a large number of alternative high school teachers should be conducted to determine if *student needs* and *student abilities* are used interchangeably or dissimilarly.
3. To elaborate on Finding 3, a study of alternative high school teachers who hold negative perceptions of their students' abilities, but hold positive perceptions of their experiences in working with alternative students should be conducted to determine

the implications of these perceptions on alternative education. Despite the research surrounding the negative perceptions of alternative schools (Bascia & Maton, 2016 ; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009) and teachers' assumptions of student ability based on educational setting placement (Yanisko, 2016), the majority of teachers expressed positive perceptions of their students' abilities despite them being placed in an alternative school.

4. A similar study using similar criteria should be performed with alternative middle school teachers to compare and contrast the perceptions and practices of alternative middle school teachers and alternative high school teachers.

Conclusion

This study used an exploratory case study to collect qualitative data by conducting anonymous surveys to understand how alternative school teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities influenced their instructional practices and how they perceived those practices to support at-risk student academic success in public alternative high schools. The data revealed that (a) the majority of alternative school teachers perceived their students' abilities in a positive light; (b) the majority of alternative high school teachers make instructional choices based on their perceptions of their students' abilities; (c) alternative high school teachers, who hold positive perceptions of their students' abilities, are more likely to employ effective instructional practices supported by the literature in this study; and (d) alternative high school teachers who hold positive perceptions of their students' abilities are more likely to rate their instruction as effective. As a result of the findings, the researcher provided recommendations for action and, after assessing the limitations of this study, the researcher also provided recommendations for further study. By pursuing the recommendations provided, teachers, their schools, and their

districts as well as other researchers can make a positive impact on the education of at-risk students in alternative settings by utilizing practices that will increase their chances of rising from low socioeconomic backgrounds and reaping opportunities for their futures.

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APPENDIX A

Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Impact of Teacher Perceptions on At-Risk Student Success

Principal Investigator(s):

Stacy Miller
Ed.D. Candidate
University of New England
smiller8@une.edu
252-571-3975

Introduction:

This study focuses on alternative public high school teachers who teach at-risk students whose alternative school assignment was due to their previous history of trouble with academics, behavior, or completion of coursework. Please read this form. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand how understand how alternative school teachers' perceptions of their at-risk students influences their instructional practices and how they perceive those practices to support at-risk student academic success in public alternative high schools.

Who will be in this study?

- This study will include teachers from public alternative high school settings who teach at-risk students in grade(s) 9, 10, 11, and/or 12 whose alternative school assignment was due to their previous history of trouble with academics, behavior, or completion of coursework.
- Teachers will be selected based on the criteria that they are (a) public school teachers, (b) they teach in an alternative high school, and (c) they teach at-risk students whose alternative school assignment was due to their previous history of trouble with academics, behavior, or completion of coursework. After it is determined teachers meet this criteria, they will be selected on a first-come, first-serve basis.

What will I be asked to do?

Anonymous Survey

- Participants will receive a digital consent form to read and electronically sign consent forms. The participants may call the researcher and request to have the consent form read aloud to them.
- Each individual survey will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.
- The survey will consist of 28 predetermined, open-ended and close-ended questions. The open-ended questions allow the participant to elaborate on his/her answers. The survey will also consist of 3 close-ended questions on Likert scale to ensure explicit responses. Teacher surveys will cover topics such as their perceptions of alternative education, alternative students, alternative students' abilities, instructional choices, and instructional practices.
- After the survey, the responses will be analyzed using codes or themes.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

- There are no direct benefits to participating in this study.
- Individual benefits may include contributing to literature on alternative schools, alternative students, and at-risk youth; and the ability to inform individual instructional practices according to the findings of this study.
- Indirect benefits may include contributing to literature on alternative schools, alternative students, and at-risk youth that could potentially inform the practices of others in alternative education and the education of at-risk youth.

What will it cost me?

There is no cost to participate in this study.

How will my privacy be protected?

- This survey is designed to keep participation and data anonymous, please do not include any information anywhere on the survey that may individually identify you or anyone else.
- Surveys will be sent via Google Forms, so participants can choose private and convenient locations to complete them.
- Data will be password protected in the researcher's university Google Drive account. Only the researcher will have access to this data. Once the study is complete, the researcher will keep the consent forms for three years. After this time, consent forms will be destroyed.
- Please note that the Institutional Review Board may review the research records.

What are my rights as a research participant?

- Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of New England has reviewed the use of human subjects in this research. The IRB is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of people involved in research.

What other options do I have?

You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

The researcher conducting this study is Stacy Miller**.** For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her at smiller8@une.edu.

If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Marylin Newell, Ph.D., Lead Advisor, at mnewell@une.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Olgun Guvench, M.D. Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board, at (207) 221-4171 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

You may print/keep a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Statement

I understand the above description of the research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I understand that by proceeding with this survey I agree to take part in this research and do so voluntarily.

APPENDIX B

Invitation to Participate

Dear (Public Alternative High School Teacher),

I am conducting anonymous online surveys as part of a research study to increase my understanding of how alternative school teachers' perceptions of their at-risk students influences their instructional practices and how they perceive those practices to support at-risk student academic success in public alternative high schools. As a public alternative high school teacher, you are an ideal participant to give valuable information from your perspective. This anonymous online survey takes approximately 20-30 minutes. The survey will capture your thoughts and perspectives on being a teacher in a public alternative high school.

This survey is designed to be anonymous, please do not include any information anywhere on the survey that may individually identify you or anyone else. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and its findings could lead to greater public understanding of alternative schools, alternative students, and at-risk youth; and potentially inform the practices of others in alternative education and the education of at-risk youth.

If you would be willing to participate in this study and meet the criteria below, please click this link, read the informed consent form, and check "yes" at the bottom of that form to continue with the survey.

a. I am an alternative public high school teacher and I teach at-risk students whose alternative school assignment was due to their previous history of trouble with academics, behavior, or completion of coursework.

[*If the above criteria is not checked, a "Please do not continue with this survey" statement will appear and the participant will be prompted to exit the survey*]

You have one week from the date of this invitation to complete the survey. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via the information below. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Stacy Miller
252-571-3975
Smiller8@une.edu

APPENDIX C

Survey Questions

Set 1: Teacher Demographics

1. Describe your level of education.
2. How many years have you been teaching?
3. Describe the schools where have you taught previously.
4. Were these previous schools alternative or traditional?

Set 2: Perceptions of Alternative Education

5. Describe alternative education.
6. Describe alternative education's purpose.
7. Describe alternative student demographics.
8. Describe alternative education's instructional practices.
9. How do you feel about alternative education as a matter of state policy?
10. How do you feel about alternative education as it pertains to your school, specifically?
11. How does alternative education compare to traditional education?
12. How does your school compare to the traditional schools in its district?
13. How would you describe your experiences in teaching alternative students?

Set 3: Perceptions of Alternative Students

14. Describe alternative school students.
15. How do you feel about alternative students at your school?
16. How do you feel about the students on your class rosters?
17. How do the students on your roster compare to students in traditional schools?

Set 4: Perceptions of Alternative Students' Abilities

18. Describe the abilities of alternative school students.
19. What do you believe are the abilities of the alternative students at your school?
20. What do you believe are the abilities of the students on your class rosters?
21. How do the abilities of the students on your roster compare to the abilities of students in traditional schools?

Set 5: Instructional Practices

22. Please list and rate three instructional practices alternative schools employ most often.
    a. Instructional Practice 1
    b. Instructional Practice 2
    c. Instructional Practice 3

a) Rate the effectiveness of (*Instructional Practice 1)*
    a. Strongly effective with alternative students
    b. Effective with alternative students
    c. Neutral
    d. Ineffective with alternative students
    e. Strongly Ineffective with alternative students

b) Rate the effectiveness of (*Instructional Practice 2)*
    a. Strongly effective with alternative students
    b. Effective with alternative students
    c. Neutral
    d. Ineffective with alternative students
    e. Strongly Ineffective with alternative students

c) Rate the effectiveness of (*Instructional Practice 3)*

a. Strongly effective with alternative students

b. Effective with alternative students

c. Neutral

d. Ineffective with alternative students

e. Strongly Ineffective with alternative students

23. Please list and rate three instructional practices your school employs most often.

a. Instructional Practice 1

b. Instructional Practice 2

c. Instructional Practice 3

a) Rate the effectiveness of (*Instructional Practice 1)*

a. Strongly effective with the alternative students in our school

b. Effective with the alternative students in our school

c. Neutral

d. Ineffective with the alternative students in our school

e. Strongly Ineffective with the alternative students in our school

b) Rate the effectiveness of (*Instructional Practice 2)*

a. Strongly effective with the alternative students in our school

b. Effective with the alternative students in our school

c. Neutral

d. Ineffective with the alternative students in our school

e. Strongly Ineffective with the alternative students in our school

c) Rate the effectiveness of (*Instructional Practice 3)*

a. Strongly effective with the alternative students in our school

b. Effective with the alternative students in our school

c. Neutral

d. Ineffective with the alternative students in our school

e. Strongly Ineffective with the alternative students in our school

24. Please list and rate three instructional practices you employ most often in your classroom.

a. Instructional Practice 1

b. Instructional Practice 2

c. Instructional Practice 3

d) Rate the effectiveness of (*Instructional Practice 1)*

a. Strongly effective with the alternative students in my classroom

b. Effective with the alternative students in my classroom

c. Neutral

d. Ineffective with the alternative students in my classroom

e. Strongly Ineffective with the alternative students in my classroom

e) Rate the effectiveness of (*Instructional Practice 2)*

a. Strongly effective with the alternative students in my classroom

b. Effective with the alternative students in my classroom

c. Neutral

d. Ineffective with the alternative students in my classroom

e. Strongly Ineffective with the alternative students in my classroom

f) Rate the effectiveness of (*Instructional Practice 3)*

a. Strongly effective with the alternative students in my classroom

b. Effective with the alternative students in my classroom

c. Neutral

d. Ineffective with the alternative students in my classroom

e. Strongly Ineffective with the alternative students in my classroom

Set 6: Factors that Influence Instructional Practices

25. How do you determine what instructional practices to use?
26. What do you believe are the major factors that influence your instructional choices?
27. How do your experiences teaching alternative students compare to teaching students at your previous schools?
28. How do the students in your classroom affect your instruction?